

## **COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE – JANUARY 12, 2010**

### **THE DAVID DUNLAP OBSERVATORY, 123 HILLSVIEW DRIVE, RICHMOND HILL, REQUEST TO SUPPORT ITS DESIGNATION AS A NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE**

#### **Recommendation**

Heritage Vaughan Committee recommends:

1. Whereas the David Dunlap Observatory is a significant cultural heritage property located at 123 Hillsview Drive in the Town of Richmond Hill; and,
2. That the Council of the Town of Richmond Hill has designated the David Dunlap Observatory under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act; and,
3. That the Region of York and the Town of Markham have endorsed Richmond Hill's efforts to recognize the significance of the David Dunlap Observatory; and,
4. That the Town of Richmond Hill is pursuing the nomination of the David Dunlap Observatory as a National Historic Site; and,
5. Therefore be it resolved, that a letter of support be sent to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada supporting the designation of the David Dunlap Observatory as a National Historic Site; and,
6. That City of Vaughan's Council resolution be forwarded to the Council of the Town of Richmond Hill.

#### **Contribution to Sustainability**

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council in the Green Directions, Vaughan, Community Sustainability Environmental Master Plan:

- 4.1 To foster a city with strong social cohesion, an engaging arts scene, and a clear sense of its culture and heritage.

#### **Economic Impact**

There is no economic impact associated with the approval of this report.

#### **Communications Plan**

Any Council decision on this matter will be forwarded to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and to the Town of Richmond Hill.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to review the recommendation of Heritage Vaughan committee to support the designation of the David Dunlap Observatory in the Town of Richmond Hill as a National Historic Site.

## **Background - Analysis and Options**

At the 18 November 2009 meeting, Heritage Vaughan recommended that a letter of support be sent to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada supporting the designation of the David Dunlap Observatory as a National Historic Site. Heritage Vaughan committee is a statutory committee of Council and makes recommendations as it relates to heritage matters and matters as authorized under the Ontario Heritage Act. This item is brought forward at the request of Councillor Alan Shefman.

David Dunlap Observatory is a significant cultural heritage property located at 123 Hillview Drive in the Town of Richmond Hill. The David Dunlap Observatory was established by the University of Toronto in 1935. The Observatory is significant as a site of important teaching, public education and research in the field of Astronomy and Astrophysics and includes the observatory structure (opened in 1935), an administration building (a stone building opened in 1935, containing classrooms and offices), and the director's residence (a brick farmhouse dating from c.1864, known as Elms Lea). In addition to the main buildings and accessory structures, the property includes landscaped open space and natural areas. After the facility closed, in 2007 the University of Toronto announced its intention to sell the entire property.

In September, 2007, the Council of the Town of Richmond Hill passed a resolution to designate the David Dunlap Observatory under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. The Reasons for Designation were amended in 2008 to include the cultural heritage landscape and building interiors. A number of objections were filed; therefore the designation was referred to the Conservation Review Board for a hearing. The Conservation Review Board hearing took place in January, 2009, resulting in a report in support of the heritage designation. In addition, the Town of Richmond Hill is developing a Planning and Conservation Management Study for the observatory lands, as part of the Official Plan amendment process.

In June, 2008, the Region of York endorsed Richmond Hill's efforts to recognize the significance of the observatory, including the land and buildings. Additionally, the Town of Markham has also sent a resolution to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada supporting the designation of the David Dunlap Observatory.

Richmond Hill is pursuing the nomination of the David Dunlap Observatory as a National Historic Site. Planning staff at Richmond Hill have advised that that a nomination will not be accepted without written authorization from the property owner. The local MP for Richmond Hill, Bryon Wilfert, has approached the owner to seek their support for the nomination, but at this time has not received a response. Mr. Wilfert has an on-line petition with respect to federal recognition for the David Dunlap Observatory as a National Historic Site.

The recognition of a property as a National Historic Site is mainly honorific. Once designated, the site qualifies for a bilingual bronze plaque, potential for agreements and financial assistance (in exceptional circumstances), and offers the potential for federal acquisition of a property for conservation and preservation purposes (in exceptional circumstances).

National Historic Site designation does not offer legal protection. Because national historic sites of Canada are not protected through designation at the federal level, private owners of these sites are encouraged to place their property under the legal protection of provincial or territorial heritage legislation. The designation of the property under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act by the Town of Richmond Hill is the vehicle for protecting the cultural heritage attributes of the David Dunlap Observatory.

It is important to note that the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada will not consider a nomination for National Historic Site status *"without the written consent of the owner(s), whether public or private."* Consent from the owner has been requested, but has not been yet granted.

## **Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/Strategic Plan**

In consideration of the strategic priorities related to Vaughan Vision 2020, the report will provide:

- **STRATEGIC GOAL:**  
Service Excellence - Providing service excellence to citizens.
- **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:**  
Preserve our heritage and support diversity, arts and culture.

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council, and the necessary resources to implement this program have been allocated and approved.

## **Regional Implications**

N/A

## **Conclusion**

David Dunlap Observatory is a significant cultural heritage property located within the Town of Richmond Hill in the Region of York. It is designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. The Town of Richmond Hill is seeking to designate the property as a National Historic Site. National designation does not offer any additional legal protection, but does offer greater public recognition, and the opportunity for additional funding. However, National designation can only occur if the property owner consents, which the property owner has yet to do. Both the Regional Municipality of York and the Town of Markham have endorsed the designation of the David Dunlap Observatory as a National Historic Site.

## **Attachments**

1. Photographs of David Dunlap Observatory

## **Report Prepared By**

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Respectfully submitted,

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Chair, Heritage Vaughan Committee



**Figure 1. David Dunlap Observatory main building, with a 74-inch telescope built in 1935.**



**Figure 2. The Administration Buildings, with two additional telescopes, part of the greater observatory complex which also includes a brick farmhouse built in 1864 and vast landscaped open space and natural areas.**